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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GB](#)  
SUBJECT: GABON: GLIMPSES OF RULING PARTY TENSION IN SENATE  
ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Political Officer Leslie Doumbia for reasons 1.4 (b) and  
(d).

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Summary  
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¶1. (U) The ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG) won an unsurprising and overwhelming victory in the January 18 senatorial election, despite ongoing internal party strife. Winning 75 of the 102 senate seats, many of the PDG candidates ran uncontested. Gabonese senators are chosen by a college of local elected officials, and the outcomes are rarely in doubt. There were a few real surprises this year, however, in districts where PDG senatorial candidates lost despite PDG dominance in the local electoral college. These small acts of "treason" have angered party leadership, which has threatened unspecified sanctions against errant party members. Opposition and independent candidates made modest gains in comparison to the 2003 senate elections, but not enough to challenge the PDG's hegemony. The Constitutional Court announced the official results January 27. In what has become something of a rote exercise, unhappy candidates have until January 30 to file electoral challenges, few of which will be successful. End Summary.

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Predictable Outcome  
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¶2. (U) "Victory Without Surprise for the PDG" announced the government-sponsored daily newspaper L'Union in its report on the January 18 senate election results. President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba's PDG claimed 75 of the 102 senate seats up for grabs in this election, and PDG candidates ran uncontested in many districts.

¶3. (U) Because the results are highly predictable, Gabonese Senate elections inspire little enthusiasm among the general population. Under Gabonese law, senators are chosen by an electoral college of officials elected in the most recent local or municipal elections. The officials generally vote their party line, leading in this and previous elections to overwhelming PDG victories.

¶4. (C) Indeed, many ordinary citizens question the need for a Senate, and the ruling party tends to use it as a repository for ex-ministers and others in search of a sinecure. Taking its cue from France, Gabon created a Senate in 1997, ostensibly to ensure more effective local representation. Under the Constitution, both the Senate and the National Assembly "vote on laws, consent to taxes and control the action of the executive power."

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A Few Surprises  
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15. (SBU) This year's election nevertheless had a few surprises, pointing to broader tensions within the ruling party. In two districts, PDG senatorial candidates lost despite their party's victories in the April 2008 local elections (reftel). In Lamberene, PDG candidate Camille Ndong received only five of fifteen available electoral votes in a district where the PDG has ten delegates. Likewise, in Booue, PDG candidate (and former minister) Pascal-Desire Missongo carried only 8 out of 17 votes in a district where his party holds 13 delegates.

16. (SBU) Speculation is rife in political circles about these upsets. According to sources in the region, delegates in Lamberene were bought off by Minister of Decentralization Richard-Auguste Onouviet and persuaded to vote against his political rival Camille Ndong--a fellow member of the PDG, and the choice of the national party for the Lambarene senatorial seat. Lambarene electors rejected Ndong and chose an independent candidate. Onouviet, formerly a powerful minister of mines and oil, was once a significant player in the PDG. His influence has waned over the last two years, however, and his latest ministerial post is widely perceived as a significant demotion. Onouviet apparently sabotaged the PDG candidate in retaliation.

17. (SBU) In Booue, an angry former minister Missongo told colleagues his defeat was orchestrated by PDG Deputy Secretary General Rigobert Ikanbouayat Ndeka, a long-time political rival. Since 2000, Missongo held three relatively important ministerial portfolios. Missongo was dropped from the cabinet and joined the senate in 2006. Missongo expected to remain in the senate as payment for many years of loyal

service to the PDG and the President. Some in his home province called him "arrogant", however, and he is said to have run an inept campaign.

18. (SBU) One senior politician who has moved to the Senate is even more disgruntled. Former Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation Jean-Boniface Assele, ousted from the government in the January 2009 reshuffle, is slated to replace Leonard Andjembe as the senate's first vice president. Assele, renowned for his political resilience, is considered a long-shot contender to lead Gabon in the post-Bongo era. Assele is the brother of Patience Dabany, former wife to President Bongo and the mother of Assele's political rival, Minister of Defense Ali Bongo. In a thinly-veiled reference to Ali Bongo, Assele told the press that Gabon should not be allowed to become a "monarchy." Ali Bongo is thought to be in the lead of behind-the-scenes struggles to succeed President Bongo, the world's longest-serving head of state.

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Heads Will Roll . . . Maybe  
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19. (SBU) While visibly delighted with his party's overwhelming victory, newly-installed PDG Secretary General Faustin Boukoubi was angered by the outcomes in Lamberene and Booue. Boukoubi, a former minister of agriculture, took office as secretary general in September 2008 with a no-nonsense attitude, promising to expel anyone who "failed to follow the party line".

110. (C) In a January 5 address to the party, Boukoubi warned that PDG members should "scrupulously defend the interests of the party and its president-founder in all circumstances." He urged PDG members voted into office in the April 2008 local and municipal elections to stay faithful to the party and vote for the PDG slate of senatorial candidates. He said "to act otherwise amounted to indiscipline and treason." And in the aftermath of the senatorial election, Boukoubi planted a long story in the state-owned l'Union newspaper, accusing senior party officials of "treason" and warning of retribution. (Note: The story was almost certainly also authorized by President Bongo. End Note.)

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Opposition Gains  
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¶11. (U) While the PDG waged their internal battles, opposition parties gained a little ground. The Gabonese Union for Democracy and Development (UGDD) of Zacharie Myboto won three seats, while Pierre Mamboundou's Gabonese People's Union (UPG) claimed two. Though small, this represented a significant gain from the two seats held by the opposition parties in the previous senate. The other seats went to parties linked to the majority and independents.

¶12. (U) The Constitutional Court announced the official results January 27. Those wishing to challenge the results have up to three days after the official announcement to submit their formal complaint with the Constitutional Court. The official results, subject to contestation, are listed below:

--Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG)-75  
--Gabon People's Union (RPG)-6  
--Gabonese Union for Democracy and Development (UGDD) of Zacharie Myboto-3  
--Gabonese People's Union (UPG) of Pierre Mamboundou-2  
--Social Democrat Party (PSD)-2  
--Center for Liberal Reformers (CLR)-2  
--Gabonese Party of Center Independents (PGCI)-2  
--Democratic and Republican Alliance (ADERE)-1  
--Independents-9 (including 3 "Batisseurs" of Me Ndoaot Rembogo)

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (SBU) Gabon's ruling PDG is not a monolith, and as President Bongo ages, tensions within the party are growing. The senate elections, though largely predictable, provided an interesting glimpse of tensions at both local and national levels. The new party secretary general has vowed to take a hard line against the "treason" of some fellow party barons. It is far from certain, however, that he has the authority to deliver on this threat. End Comment.  
REDDICK